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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENGDU 000187

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SUBJECT: TIBET: NGO WORKING TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY IN NW YUNNAN

REF: A. A) 08 CHENGDU 000197
[1](#)B. B) 08 CHENGDU 000238 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)C. C) 09 CHENGDU 000149

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Visiting USG-funded projects to support Tibetan livelihood in NW Yunnan run by the Tibet Poverty Alleviation Fund (TPAF), CG and ConGen staff saw successful programs that teach engine repair and business skills and support craftspeople by connecting them with international markets. Underscoring what we saw, the local Poverty Alleviation Office director expressed his strong satisfaction with the TPAF programs, while TPAF's country director told us the local government hopes to emulate their project to improve rural welfare through training in health, hygiene, and nutrition. End Summary.

Training in Tractor Engine Repair and Business Skills

[1](#)2. (SBU) Shouting over the din of wrenches clanking against engine blocks, Shangri-la Poverty Alleviation Office Zhang Chunshan told CG August 14 that TPAF's tractor engine repair project was useful for Shangri-la (previously known as Zhongdian, seat of the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in NW Yunnan), and that he hoped the Prefecture's cooperative relationship with TPAF would continue. The project, funded by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, currently consists of 28 young Tibetan male trainees from six of Shangri-la County's 11 townships. The trainees are learning to repair small engines that can be fitted onto tractors or rigged onto the front of small trucks. Building on a previous TPAF motorcycle repair project in Lhasa in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), this is TPAF's first project in Yunnan, TPAF Country Director Tony Gleason told us. The program offers four-plus months of training in tractor engine repair, followed by an official test given by the local labor department. Of the current crew of trainees, 15 will also be selected for a follow-on project focused on minivan repair, as demand for minivans is growing with Shangri-la's increased tourist flow.

[1](#)3. (SBU) For those trainees who show the greatest potential, TPAF also offers business training to help establish their new tractor engine repair businesses. The business training consists of four phases: how to choose a location for a new business, market analysis, establishing a business plan, and follow-up training. TPAF also makes small loans using USAID funds to some trainees whose plans show good promise, with establishment of a profitable business requiring a loan of only 8-12,000 RMB (USD 1200-1800). While Han Chinese often try to move into rural areas to compete in the engine repair business,

they often give up after a Tibetan who has received TPAF training establishes a business, as the Tibetan is more welcome by locals, Gleason said. The entire program cost just 320,000 RMB (just under USD 50,000, of which TPAF contributed about 95 percent, with the local Poverty Alleviation Office having contributed the balance), Gleason said.

Marketing Tibetan Handicrafts, From Rugs to Yak Puppets

¶4. (SBU) At TPAF's Dropenling Tibetan handicrafts social enterprise, located in Shangri-la's old town, Gleason explained that TPAF had recently established the not-for-profit business spinoff in Yunnan to provide diversification following a steep drop in sales after the 2008 unrest in the TAR (though the Yunnan site may become Dropenling's sole presence, as TPAF perceives that TAR officials want to shut down the Dropenling operation in Lhasa). Utilizing hundreds of Tibetan craftspeople in the TAR who produce traditional Tibetan items ranging from hand-knotted rugs to fuzzy yak hand-puppets, Dropenling then markets the items through a variety of channels, including its storefront presence in Shangri-la, a well-developed web presence (www.tibetcraft.com), international sales trips to wholesale purchasers, and most recently through sales relationships established with museum shops in the United States and Europe.

Improving Rural Health Through Behavior Change

¶5. (SBU) TPAF's health program, which used their own "Behavior Change Communication" model, has been so successful that local health departments have asked to adopt the program for their own use, Gleason said in a discussion following the site visits. This train-the-trainer model, begun in 2005, consists of two phases. The first, lasting 7-10 days, brings together three individuals from each participating village, usually including a village leader, a member of the women's federation, and a doctor

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or member of the county health bureau to learn about health, hygiene, and nutrition. Individuals in these specific roles are chosen because they tend to have more credibility in the community and make successful trainers. The second phase occurs three months later, lasting another seven days, during which time participants discuss lessons learned since the initial training as well as learn additional information. During follow-up, TPAF works with participants to implement what they have learned in ways that fit their particular communities, e.g. building hygienic greenhouses, or building new latrines, or other relevant projects. Calculating the number of people that each trainee has in turned trained, and adding up the number of people in those households, TPAF estimates that the program so far has over 90,000 direct beneficiaries.

¶6. (SBU) Asked about bilingual issues in dealing with primarily Tibetan beneficiaries, Gleason noted the program's brochures are currently in Tibetan, as the program started in the TAR. In Yunnan, however, where few Tibetans can read in their native language, the brochures are of little use, he said. TPAF (which has no Han Chinese staff) is having trouble, however, translating the brochures into Chinese.

¶7. (SBU) A discussion with Gleason on the situation faced by International NGOs in the TAR is reported septel.

BROWN